

# First Thoughts on the UK General Election Result 2017

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1. Any kind of formal co-operative pact between the UK Conservative Party and Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is Faustian and will undoubtedly very quickly destroy whatever is left of Theresa May's reputation and career as PM. It will also further re-toxify the Tories, polarise politics in England (and I mean England), and re-introduce sectarianism as a poison into the British (and I mean British) body politic.
2. To explain things for those unfamiliar with the history and politics of Northern Ireland (which is effectively everyone outside Northern Ireland) the DUP is the insurgent party originally founded by Rev. Ian Paisley for the Scotch Irish Presbyterian working class. The DUP was a hard-line breakaway from the Official Ulster Unionist Party, which was the party of the upper (middle) class Anglican Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy which had ruled the six counties of Northern Ireland since the devolved Parliament of Northern Ireland, sitting in Stormont in Belfast, has been created by the UK Parliament by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. On 6 December 1921, following over five years of civil unrest and military conflict in Ireland, there were signed in London – by representatives of the island of Great Britain on the one hand and of the island of Ireland on the other (though when and how Great Britain and Ireland had again become distinct entities in international law to be able to negotiate treaties is not clear) – "Articles of an Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland", commonly known as the British-Irish Treaty. Clause 11 of this British-Irish Treaty gave this Parliament of Northern Ireland one month from the date of coming into force of the Irish Free State (Agreement) Act 1922 and the Irish Free State Constitution Act 1922 (which gave this British-Irish Treaty, and the Irish Free State Constitution, the force of UK domestic law) to decide whether the territory of Northern Ireland ("as determined in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions") should remain in, or opt out from, the Irish Free State. Stormont duly exercised this opt out. So it was this decision, by a devolved Parliament sitting in Belfast, which created the present country which is United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
3. Northern Ireland was consciously created to be a protestant State for a protestant people and its Ulster Unionist leaders in the first 50 years of Stormont rule (from the 1920s to the 1970s) self-consciously described it as such, in proud distinction from the confessional Catholic State which the American born Eamon De Valera worked to make of the 26 counties which made up the Irish Free State and, after 1949, the Irish Republic. Although De Valera declared the Irish Republic to be wholly independent of the United Kingdom in 1948, the UK Parliament pretended not to notice and instead passed the Ireland Act 1949 which, in Section 1(1) "recognized and declared that the part of Ireland heretofore known as Eire ceased, as from 18 April 1949, to be part of His Majesty's dominions" but declared in Section 2(1) that "notwithstanding that the Republic of Ireland is not part of His Majesty's dominions, the Republic of Ireland is not a foreign country for the purposes of any law in force in any part of the United Kingdom". Irish citizens therefore had and have in the United Kingdom full civil and political rights, including the right to vote in all UK elections and in all referenda. The Irish Republic has since itself moved in and may, like Quebec, best be described as post-Catholic. In the 100 or so years since the partition of Ireland the social and political distinctions between the North and the rest of the island has greatly widened and there is no burning desire in the Irish Republic for Irish reunification.
4. Northern Ireland – both Catholic and Protestant – thus feels itself isolated and abandoned. Because Northern Ireland is so small and the sectarian hatreds so fierce, the tendency in Northern Ireland is for the two sides (broadly Catholic Irish nationalist v. Protestant British unionists) to draw succour from other people's conflicts. It is thus a commonplace in Northern Ireland to go through one village or small town which will mark out its status as Protestant and Unionist by flying the flag of Protestant Northern Ireland (which is the English red cross of St. George centred by the Red Hand of O'Neill of Ulster) alongside the Israeli flag. One knows when one has then moved into a Catholic

nationalist community by the fact that the flagpoles there are flying the green white and gold tricolour of the Irish Republic together with the flag of the Palestinian Territories. Further, in the 1960s the Catholic Nationalists protest movement against entrenched discrimination against them took inspiration from Martin Luther King and consciously modelled their speeches and protests and slogans on the Civil Rights movements in the United States, even adopting the slogan "One Man, one Vote" in protest against gerrymandering and the fact that votes were allocated according to properties owned, meaning that it was possible for landowners and those owning business properties (primarily the Protestant middle and upper classes) legally to vote early and often in elections to Stormont. Meanwhile, the Orange Order – to which the DUP still maintains string links – consciously modelled itself and saw itself as paralleled by the political and social role played by the Ku Klux Klan in the southern United States.

5. For the most part Northern Ireland is a place in relation to which those who live on the island of Britain and indeed those who live in the Irish Republic now know little of and care less. But for the UK Tory Party to ally itself with the DUP will bring all that messy and ugly history back into mainstream of our politics. This cannot bode well.

6 My recipe for the Tory party to save itself from the damnation of Faust is for it to remove Theresa May "with all deliberate speed" (to quote *Brown v. Board of Education*) and replace her as leader with Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party who currently sits in the Scottish Parliament.

7. The UK Tory Party owes Ruth Davidson a lot. She has effectively allowed them to maintain their hold on power in the UK in this last election. By de-toxifying the Tory brand in Scotland – a task that would have been thought impossible just five years ago – she wrested 12 seats from the SNP to produce a total of 13 Tory MPs from Scotland. If she had not been so successful in her campaign in Scotland, the Tories would have had 12 seats less from their now total of 318, bringing this down to 306. Those seats would have otherwise gone to Labour, Liberal Democrats or the SNP which would have meant that the non-Tory parties would have been able to combine and co-operate to create a workable and working majority in the House of Commons such as to form a government.

8. Ruth Davidson has shown herself to be a formidable political campaigner with an easy manner, relaxed on camera, comfortable with people. More importantly she would utterly de-toxify the Tory brand as she is woman, of working class background and educated at a comprehensive school, a married lesbian whose wife is Irish Catholic. In one bound with Ruth Davidson as their leader the Tories would steal the mantle of being "progressive" from Labour, they would look modern, less class-ridden, more diverse and open, and so much younger. The youth vote that turned out for Jeremy Corbyn this time would more readily fall for it. Her Scottishness would help massively too in that she would have a much more assured approach to "the precious precious (British) Union" than Teresa May ever managed. Her Scottish accent means that to English ears she cannot be assigned to any particular class which would work to her advantage in the class-ridden class conscious society that is England in general and the Conservative party in particular. And it would be one up against Ireland, in that not only would we also have a gay PM but a woman. David Cameron always went on about gay marriage being his proudest achievement. How sexy (in the political sense) would it be to have a gay married PM for the Tories.

9. Meanwhile what plans might Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, have? It may be, rather than focus on plans for a second Scottish independence referendum in the short to medium term (which undoubtedly cost her party votes) she can re-insert herself into the centre of UK and European politics by offering that Scotland, rather than the UK Government allied to the DUP, become the co-guarantor with the Irish republic of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that offers assurances to the Catholic nationalist community that Northern Ireland will not return to the bad old days of discrimination and second class citizenship for Catholics, and instead will ensure parity of esteem for Irish nationalism as a way of being fully Northern Irish (even if not wholly British) such that NI's political stability is maintained, IRA/UVF terrorism given no opening and the Troubles remain in the past. The idea of Nicola Sturgeon as honest broker, filling a political vacuum created by the proposed unholy alliance between the UK Conservative and the DUP, as peace-maker on an international stage directly connecting with a similarly progressive youngish gay Irish Taoiseach or Prime Minister in Leo Varadkar might well prove an irresistible outlet and opportunity and allow her to maintain the talk about and influence over the future UK constitution as well as to

continue to lobby for a special deal for Scotland with – or even within – the European Union.

10. In sum, we are cursed to live in such interesting times.

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